



April 1, 2015

The Honorable Carol Liu
Senator, District 25
State Capitol, Room 5066
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: **Senate Bill 608, Right to Rest Act**

Dear Senator Liu,

Established in 1924, the Central City Association (CCA) is Los Angeles's premier business advocacy organization, with 450 members employing over 350,000 people in the Los Angeles region. CCA is strongly opposed to Senate Bill (SB) 608, the Right to Rest Act.

The bill is a grossly misguided attempt to "help the homeless" but all it does is assure that people will continue to deteriorate and die on the streets, parks and public open spaces in our State. SB 608 does not provide funds for permanent supportive housing or transitional housing of any kind. It does not provide badly needed mental health or drug addiction services and it does not provide support for effective outreach.

Homelessness is a human tragedy and there is no place more tragic than the Skid Row area of Downtown Los Angeles-ground zero for homelessness in the United States. The pictures attached document the crisis and show what happens when the rights of the community are ignored. If you would not tolerate these conditions in front of your own home or on the public streets elsewhere in your district, you cannot in good conscience support this bill.

CCA Supports Legislation That is Responsive to Local Jurisdictions

Los Angeles has unique circumstances which dictate the use of the public right-of-way. The City of Los Angeles is party to the *Jones* Settlement and the *Lavan* decision.

The *Jones* Settlement allows individuals to sleep on sidewalks between the hours of 9:00 p.m.- 6:00 a.m. citywide. The parties agreed that sleeping will no longer be allowed on sidewalks when 1,250 units of permanent supportive housing for the homeless have been constructed within the City. The City has been acting in good faith and continues to invest in permanent supportive housing. SB 608 would undercut the intent of this settlement which is to house homeless individuals and allow people to sleep on any street in California, completely disregarding the health and safety of the homeless and community.

The *Lavan* decision forbids the removal and disposal of personal property and other items from the sidewalks or streets, unless the City can establish the goods are actually abandoned. Currently, the City is requiring 72 hour posting on personal items prior to removal, as well as storage of personal items for 90 days. This has resulted in inaccessible and unsanitary sidewalks, jeopardizing public health and creating an environment which makes it extremely difficult for law enforcement to insure public safety. SB 608 will add further negative impacts, resulting in widespread sidewalks blocked with trash and debris, making it impossible for law enforcement to act until a crime is committed.

CCA Believes All Neighborhoods Deserve to be Safe & Clean

The Skid Row area in Downtown Los Angeles consists of 52 square blocks with 3,463 homeless men and women living in shelters and on the streets. This neighborhood represents the most concentrated area of homeless people in the country and poses a constant challenge to keep the area clean and safe.

On May 21, 2012, the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health (DPH) issued a Notice of Violation to the City due to the unsanitary conditions on the City's sidewalks and public areas of Skid Row. The unsanitary conditions that City was cited for included: human and animal feces, urine, vermin hypodermic needles, rodent infestation, razor blades, drug paraphernalia, garbage and furniture. DPH ordered the City to clean the area and to continue to maintain hygiene there.

In response to the citation, the City has annually allocated \$3.4mil. to the Operation Healthy Streets program. Operation Healthy Streets includes outreach and emergency service to the homeless, increased street cleanings, and inspections; and the provision of additional voluntary and mandatory storage service for homeless individual's belongings.

Currently, any progress that is made with Operation Healthy Streets is quickly undone by the pervasiveness of sleeping on the sidewalks within Skid Row; if SB 608 becomes law the City and every other jurisdiction in California would be strained to keep areas free of debris, human waste, tents, furniture and other items. SB 608 will result in significant costs to local jurisdictions and negative health impacts for people living and working in these areas.

CCA Supports Sustainable Solutions for Homelessness

SB 608 provides more protections for homeless than for other citizens which greatly compromise a community. It is also unfair to the men, women and children who want to live, work and play in a safe and clean neighborhood. If approved, this legislation will drastically impact law enforcement's ability to deal with problem homeless populations, specifically those with drug addiction and suffering mental illness. The bill does not address the serious public health and safety consequences of people living on the street. Many homeless individuals suffer from mental illness, and these vulnerable individuals are often exploited by criminals. Institutionalizing life on the street does not help mentally ill homeless individuals. This approach has been tried for decades and failed. There are many good practices emerging now such as the Coordinated Entry System in Los Angeles which prioritizes the most vulnerable to receive housing first.

The *Jones* Settlement and *Lavan* decision combined with the State's rigorous standards for involuntary commitment for the mentally ill, make Los Angeles the City with the largest concentrated homeless population in the nation. Yet it has the fewest tools to assist the unsheltered on our sidewalks to actually transition from sidewalk to shelter. Los Angeles needs more resources. Approval of SB 608 will bring unsanitary and unsafe conditions to every neighborhood in California while, doing nothing to address homelessness. This is unfair to homeless individuals, business owners, residents and other community stakeholders.

CCA is committed to addressing homelessness and will continue to advocate for additional funding for permanent supportive housing and diversion programs that keep mentally disabled individuals out of jail. Unfortunately, SB 608 does not address homelessness and if approved, will greatly compromise the health and safety of communities across California. CCA appreciates your consideration and urges opposition of SB 608.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Carol E. Schatz".

Carol E. Schatz
President & CEO

Cc: The Honorable Kevin de León, Senate President pro Tempore;
Honorable Members, CA State Senate Transportation and Housing Committee, Senator Jim Beall, Chair
Honorable Members, CA State Senate Judiciary Committee, Senator Hanna Beth Jackson, Chair

Encl: Photos of Skid Row

Photos of Skid Row, Downtown Los Angeles

